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Management response to the UNICEF evaluation report

Evaluation of UNICEF strategies and programmes to reduce stunting in children under 5 years of age

Summary

UNICEF welcomes the first comprehensive evaluation of the organization's strategies and programme performance to reduce stunting in young children. Stunting in early childhood is a major concern because of its links to increased mortality and morbidity, the irreversible loss of cognitive development – especially when stunting is severe – the implications for school readiness in early childhood, reduced productivity and wages in adulthood, and losses in human capital and national income.

Overall, UNICEF concurs with the evaluation process and methods, the adequacy of the evidence collected, and the findings and recommendations. The evaluation highlights four main recommendations that have been fully embraced in the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2018–2021, and are summarized here: (1) To formulate the UNICEF strategy on maternal and child nutrition from now until 2030, building on the 2015 document 'UNICEF's approach to scaling up nutrition for mothers and their children', to align with the Sustainable Development Goal targets for nutrition, and to ensure the articulation of nutrition-specific programming and nutrition-sensitive, cross-sectoral approaches; (2) To include a deliberate focus on stunting reduction in relevant global, regional and country plans for nutrition, including the establishment of a global-regional-country compact to accelerate progress in countries with high burdens of stunting; (3) To develop and roll-out a knowledge-generation and dissemination plan to support UNICEF programming for the prevention of stunting and other forms of malnutrition in all contexts. This plan will document and/or share evidence, data, information, tools, good practices and lessons for policy development, programme design and scale-up, advocacy and knowledge generation, across countries and regions; and (4) To ensure continued intersectoral coordination within and outside UNICEF, and inter-agency coordination through the United Nations in the areas of nutrition-sensitive programming and multisectoral approaches to reduce stunting and other forms of malnutrition in all programme contexts.

* E/ICEF/2018/8.

Note: The present document was processed in its entirety by UNICEF.

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Key evaluation recommendations and UNICEF management response

Action	*Responsible section/s*	*Expected completion date*	*Actions taken and implementation stage: Not started Under way Completed Cancelled*	*Supporting documents*
Evaluation recommendation 1: Building on the document, 'UNICEF's Approach to Scaling up Nutrition', formulate a more concrete UNICEF Strategy for Maternal and Child Nutrition (2030) that aligns closely with the narrative, goals and targets of the Sustainable Development Agenda to eliminate stunting and all forms of malnutrition (New York HQ). **Management response: Agree**				
Action 1 The Nutrition Section, Programme Division (PD) will lead the formulation of the UNICEF strategy for maternal and child nutrition, to prevent stunting and other forms of malnutrition in all programming contexts. The strategy will build on the document entitled 'UNICEF's approach to scaling up nutrition for mothers and their children'; align with the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2018–2021 and the Sustainable Development Goals; and will outline how UNICEF will contribute to accelerate nutrition results in countries with a high burden (i.e. absolute number and/or proportion) of children who suffer from stunting or other forms of malnutrition.	Nutrition Section-PD	2018 Q4	Under way Nutrition Section-PD has included this action in its 2018 workplan. The first planning meeting took place on 9 February 2018 and a timeline is being drafted for development, review and endorsement of the strategy.	UNICEF's approach to scaling up nutrition for mothers and their children[1]
Evaluation recommendation 2: Define and articulate approaches in the next Strategic Plan (2018–2021) that enable the UNICEF Nutrition Section/Programme to convene cross-sectoral coordination for the reduction of stunting with agreed-upon roles and contributions (New York HQ). **Management response: Agree**				
Action 2 UNICEF will ensure that the Strategic Plan,	PD	2018 Q4	Under way	UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2018–2021[2]

[1] Available from: www.unicef.org/nutrition/files/Unicef_Nutrition_Strategy.pdf.

[2] Available from: www.unicef.org/about/execboard/files/2017-17-Rev1-Strategic_Plan_2018-2021-ODS-EN.pdf.

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2018–2021 enables cross-sectoral approaches for the reduction of stunting and other forms of malnutrition, in line with the Sustainable Development Goals.			UNICEF has ensured that its Strategic Plan, 2018–2021 includes Goal Area 1: Every child survives and thrives, which brings together health, nutrition, HIV/AIDS, and early childhood development (ECD) and includes an output relating to the prevention of stunting and other forms of malnutrition and a target to reach 250 million children with services for the prevention of stunting and other forms of malnutrition annually by 2021. It also includes strategies such as "programming for at-scale results for children", which promotes cross-sectoral work to achieve results for children, including the prevention of child stunting. In addition, cross-sectoral work on community-systems for survival, growth and development (PD Health, Nutrition and ECD Sections), food systems and children (Nutrition Section, Private Fundraising and Partnerships Division, and Office of Research-Innocenti), nutrition of school-age children (PD Nutrition and Education Sections) and nutrition of adolescents and young people (PD Nutrition, Gender, and Adolescent Development and Participation Sections) are under way to prevent stunting and other forms of malnutrition in the children of this generation, while breaking the intergenerational cycle of stunting and malnutrition.	

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Evaluation recommendation 3: Promote and support concrete processes that help clarify roles and responsibilities of strategic partners within and outside the United Nations, especially in the areas of nutrition-sensitive programming and multi-sectoral approaches to reduce stunting (New York HQ, regional and country levels). **Management response: Agree**				
Action 3 **3.1** Nutrition Section-PD will provide technical and programmatic support to the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Lead Group (SUN Movement Lead Group), the SUN Movement secretariat, and SUN Movement networks at global, regional and country levels.	Nutrition Section-PD	2018 Q4	Under way Nutrition Section-PD provided technical and programmatic support to the SUN Movement Lead Group meeting in September 2017, for the Group's annual meeting that was chaired by the UNICEF Executive Director. Strategic support at global, regional and country levels was also provided for the successful organization of the 2017 SUN Movement Global Gathering in Côte d'Ivoire in November 2017. This engagement will continue in 2018.	http://scalingupnutrition.org/
3.2 The Nutrition Section-PD will promote and support biannual inter-agency coordination meetings between the five United Nations organizations working in nutrition and food security (the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the World Food Programme (WFP), the World Health Organization (WHO) and UNICEF, and will support the development of joint situation analyses on food and nutrition security.	Nutrition Section-PD	2018 Q4	Under way Nutrition Section-PD co-led the first annual coordination meeting between the five United Nations organizations working in nutrition and food security (FAO, IFAD, WFP, WHO and UNICEF) in March 2018.	
Evaluation recommendation 4: Develop and promote [a] theory of change and guidance that informs stunting-reduction strategies in regions and countries where the prevalence of stunting is high. Strategies should operationalize context-specific, multi-sectoral approaches with strategic sectors and partners (New York HQ, regional and country levels). **Management response: Agree**				

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Action 4 Nutrition Section-PD will develop and use a theory of change that guides programmes and approaches to reduce stunting and other forms of malnutrition in regions and countries where the prevalence/burden is high, while highlighting the specific contribution by UNICEF to the overall theory of change, in line with Sustainable Development Goals and the UNICEF strategy for maternal and child nutrition.	Nutrition Section-PD	2018 Q4	Not yet started Nutrition Section-PD has included this activity in its 2018 workplan and will start work in April 2018 as part of the development of the UNICEF strategy for maternal and child nutrition.	
Evaluation recommendation 5: Include a deliberate focus on stunting reduction in global, regional and country plans for nutrition through the inclusion of nutrition-specific interventions, nutrition-sensitive approaches, stunting-specific indicators and strategic multi-sectoral approaches (New York HQ, regional and country levels). **Management response: Agree**				
Action 5 **5.1** Nutrition Section-PD will develop, in consultation with 4 regional offices and 10 country offices in Africa and Asia, a plan of action for the prevention of stunting in the 10 countries that account for around 70 per cent of stunted children globally (i.e., more than 100 million children).	Nutrition Section-PD	2018 Q4	Not yet started The Global Nutrition Network Meeting took place in October 2017 and convened the 10 countries that account for an estimated 70 per cent of stunted children globally and their respective regional offices. Headquarters (HQ), regional offices (ROs) and country offices (COs) agreed on a joint plan of action to address stunting. A draft matrix of commitments and results was compiled. These activities have been included in the 2018 workplans of the relevant COs, ROs and Nutrition Section-PD.	

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5.2 Nutrition co-leads efforts to confirm the inclusion of stunting-reduction goals and targets in UNICEF regional headline results/priorities in the four regions with the largest burden of stunting among children – East Asia and the Pacific; Eastern and Southern Africa; South Asia; and West and Central Africa.	Nutrition Section-PD	2018 Q4	Under way Nutrition Section-PD, with the Regional Nutrition Advisers, has successfully advocated for the inclusion of stunting-reduction goals and targets in UNICEF regional headline results/priorities in the four regions with the largest burden of stunting.	
Evaluation recommendation 6: Assess capacity gaps and needs in countries where stunting prevalence is high. Mobilize partners and leverage UNICEF's niche in the area of upstream work to further expand/diversify capacity-building activities (country level). **Management response: Agree**				
Action 6 Nutrition Section-PD will support capacity gap analysis in the 10 countries with the highest burden of child stunting, with a focus on community-based delivery of essential nutrition interventions through systems strengthening. This analysis will inform and shape acceleration strategies for the prevention of stunting in high-burden areas.	Nutrition Section-PD	2018 Q4	Not yet started Nutrition Section-PD has included this activity in the section's 2018 workplan as part of a larger Goal Area 1 capacity gap analysis of community platforms for child survival, growth and development outcomes.	
Evaluation recommendation 7: Include concrete and detailed equity-focused approaches in the context of policy, strategy and programme actions for the reduction of stunting, with reference to specific approaches, targets and indicators for the reduction of stunting among the most vulnerable children (regional and country levels). **Management response: Agree**				
Action 7 Nutrition Section-PD will identify the approaches required to reach the most vulnerable children, as part of a capacity gap analysis of community-based delivery of	Nutrition Section-PD	2018 Q4	Not yet started Nutrition Section-PD has included this activity in its 2018 workplan.	

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essential nutrition interventions for the prevention of stunting.				
Evaluation recommendation 8: Invest more systematically in improving knowledge generation about the determinants of stunting and the interventions that are more effective in reducing stunting in different contexts. Use this knowledge as the evidence-base for advocacy, resource mobilization and programme planning (New York HQ, regional and country levels). **Management response: Agree**				
Action 8 **8.1** Nutrition Section-PD will create, in line with the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2018–2021, a new programme unit on knowledge and partnerships for nutrition, with efforts made to have dedicated staff funded by regular resources.	Nutrition Section-PD	2018 Q2	Ongoing As of 1 January 2018, a new programme area on knowledge and partnerships for nutrition was created, with a programme unit comprising four posts: a specialist focusing on evidence generation and knowledge management (funded by regular resources); a second specialist focusing on partnerships, monitoring and evaluation (funded by other resources); a third specialist focusing on communications and advocacy (funded by other resources); and a GS-5 programme assistant (funded by regular resources). A primary focus of the new programme unit is to improve documentation and sharing of evidence, data, information, tools, good practices and lessons for advocacy, policy development, strategy design, programme scale-up and knowledge across the countries in a region and across different regions.	
8.2 Nutrition Section-PD will develop and roll-out a knowledge generation and dissemination	Nutrition Section-PD	2018 Q2	Under way	

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plan in support of UNICEF programming for the prevention of stunting and other forms of malnutrition in all programming contexts.			A knowledge generation and dissemination plan has been developed and was shared with Regional Advisers at the Global Nutrition Network Meeting in October 2017. The draft plan, incorporating relevant feedback, was finalized in December 2017 and its implementation started in the first quarter of 2018.	
8.3 Nutrition Section-PD will finalize and disseminate a series of analyses on the determinants of stunting and other forms of malnutrition in South Asia, which is home to 40 per cent of the world's stunted children.	Nutrition Section-PD	2018 Q2	Under way Analyses on the determinants of stunting and other forms of malnutrition in South Asia is under way and will be completed by 30 June 2018. It will be disseminated in September 2018 in the form of publication in a special issue of the international journal *Maternal* and *Child Nutrition*.	
Evaluation recommendation 9: Improve documentation and sharing of evidence, data, information, tools, good practices, and lessons for advocacy, policy development, strategy design, programme scale-up and knowledge generation, across countries in a region and across different regions (New York HQ and regional levels). **Management response: Agree**				
Action 9 **9.1** As mentioned above, the Nutrition Section-PD will create, in line with the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2018–2021, a new programme unit on knowledge and partnerships for nutrition, with efforts made to have dedicated staff funded by regular resources.	Nutrition Section-PD	2018 Q2	Ongoing As of 1 January 2018, a new programme area on knowledge and partnerships for nutrition was created, with a programme unit comprising four posts: a specialist focusing on evidence generation and knowledge management (funded by	UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2018–2021[3]

[3] Ibid.

Action	*Responsible section/s*	*Expected completion date*	*Actions taken and implementation stage: Not started / Under way / Completed / Cancelled*	*Supporting documents*
			regular resources); a second specialist focusing on partnerships, monitoring and evaluation (funded by other resources); a third specialist focusing on communications and advocacy (funded by other resources); and a GS-5 programme assistant (funded by regular resources). A primary focus of the new programme unit is to improve documentation and sharing of evidence, data, information, tools, good practices and lessons for advocacy, policy development, strategy design, programme scale-up and knowledge across the countries in a region and across different regions.	
9.2 To develop and roll-out a knowledge generation and dissemination plan in support of UNICEF programming for the prevention of stunting and other forms of malnutrition in all programming contexts. This plan will document and/or share evidence, data, information, tools, good practices and lessons for policy development, programme design and scale-up, advocacy and knowledge generation, across countries and regions.	Nutrition Section-PD	2018 Q2	Under way A knowledge generation and dissemination plan has been developed and was shared with Regional Advisers at the Global Nutrition Network Meeting in October 2017. The draft plan, incorporating relevant feedback, was finalized in December 2018 and its implementation started in the first quarter of 2018.	
Evaluation recommendation 10: Incorporate accountability across sections to improve collaboration and cooperation towards better results orientation to reducing stunting and use them as the basis in assessing the achievement of country programme targets (country level). **Management response: Agree**				

Action	*Responsible section's*	*Expected completion date*	*Actions taken and implementation stage:* *Not started* *Under way* *Completed* *Cancelled*	*Supporting documents*
Action 10 UNICEF will implement in its Strategic Plan, 2018–2021 approaches that enable the Nutrition Section to convene cross-sectoral coordination for the reduction of stunting and other forms of malnutrition in all programming contexts, in line with the Sustainable Development Goals and the UNICEF strategy for maternal and child nutrition.	PD	2018 Q4	Under way UNICEF has ensured that its Strategic Plan, 2018–2021 includes Goal Area 1: Every child survives and thrives, which brings together health, nutrition, HIV/AIDS and ECD, and includes an output relating to the prevention of stunting and other forms of malnutrition and a target to reach 250 million children with services for the prevention of stunting and other forms of malnutrition annually by 2021. It also includes strategies such as "programming for at-scale results for children", which promotes cross-sectoral work to achieve results for children, including the prevention of child stunting. In addition, cross-sectoral work on community-systems for survival, growth and development (PD Health, Nutrition and ECD Sections), food systems and children (PD Nutrition Section, Private Fundraising and Partnerships Division, Office of Research-Innocenti), nutrition of school-age children (Nutrition and Education Sections) and nutrition of adolescents and young people (PD Nutrition, Gender, and Adolescent Development and Participation Sections) are under way to prevent stunting and other forms of malnutrition in the children of this	UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2018–2021[4]

[4] Ibid.

Action	*Responsible section s*	*Expected completion date*	*Actions taken and implementation stage: Not started Under way Completed Cancelled*	*Supporting documents*
			generation, while breaking the intergenerational cycle of stunting and malnutrition.	
Evaluation recommendation 11: Leverage resources and expertise in tracking country financial resources for nutrition to improve availability of reliable country budget data and facilitate dialogue with national governments related to funding allocations for stunting reduction (country level). **Management response: Agree**				
Action 11 Nutrition Section-PD will collaborate with the Social Inclusion and Policy Section-PD, the SUN Movement secretariat, the World Bank and/or other partners in supporting countries to track national financial resources and budgets for nutrition and stunting reduction.	Nutrition Section-PD	2018 Q4	Not yet started This activity has not started but plans are under way with Social Inclusion and Policy-PD to support countries that become eligible for funding from the Power of Nutrition partnership to track their national financial resources and nutrition budgets through public expenditure reviews and related approaches.	